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THOMAS NELSON AND SONS,

COURAGE AND CANDOUR.

"The fear of man bringeth a snare : but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe."—Prov. xxix. 25.



THE DEAD-CART.

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JONAS COLTER was as gallant an old seaman as ever sailed on salt water.

He was kind and generous, also, and would have shared his last shilling or his last crust with any poor creature who required it. Jonas loved his Bible and loved his church, and might have been seen regu-

larly every Sunday morning with his book under his arm stumping along with his wooden leg, on his way to the house of prayer. But Jonas had one sad failing,—rather should I call it one great sin; for *an angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression*. He had no sort of command over his temper, and that temper was an uncommonly bad one.

“There are many excuses to be made for him,” his sister, Mrs. Morris, would often say. “Just think what a rough life he has led, and how much he has had to suffer. If his temper rises sometimes like a gale of wind, like a gale of wind it is soon over!”

“But, like a gale of wind, it leaves its effects behind it!” observed a neighbour, when this remark was repeated to him. “I shan’t care to call often at Mrs. Morris’s house while her bear of a brother makes it his den!”

There were perhaps none on earth whom Jonas loved better than Johnny and Alie, the children of his sister; and yet none suffered

more from his fierce and ungoverned temper. They feared him more than they loved him; and notwithstanding the many little presents which he made them, and the many little kindnesses which he showed them, his absence, when he left home, was always felt as a relief. It is impossible to regard with the greatest affection one who puts you in perpetual fear, or to feel quite happy with a companion whose smile may in a moment be changed to a frown, whose pleasant talk to a passionate outburst.

Johnny, though considered a courageous boy, was afraid of rousing his uncle; and if to him Jonas was an object of fear, to Alie he was an object of terror. Alie was one of the most timid little creatures in the village. She would go a long way round to avoid passing a large dog, was uneasy at the sight of a turkey-cock, and never dared so much as raise her eyes if a stranger happened to address her. It was not only from the temper of her uncle that poor little Alie now suffered: Johnny, while himself annoyed at

the roughness of Jonas, with the imitative disposition of youth, began in a certain degree to copy it. He knew that the old sailor was thought generous and brave, and therefore wished to be like him; but made the very common mistake of imitators,—followed him rather in his defects than in those things which were worthy of admiration. Perhaps Johnny also tried to hide from himself and others how much he was cowed by his uncle, by assuming a blustering manner himself. This is so often unconsciously done, that whenever I see a bully I am inclined to suspect that I am looking at a coward.

Alie was fond of listening to her uncle's sea-stories,—“long yarns,” as he called them,—but only if she could listen unobserved. Her favourite place was the window-seat, where she could draw the curtain before her to screen her from observation. To be suddenly addressed by her uncle was enough to make the timid child start.

Jonas had many curiosities from foreign

parts, which it amused the children to see,—dried sea-weeds, reptiles in bottles, odd specimens of work done in straw by savages in some distant islands with unpronounceable names. These treasures were never kept under lock and key; it was quite enough that they belonged to the terrible Jonas; no one was likely to meddle much with his goods, lest he should “give ’em a bit of his mind.”

“Alie,” cried Johnny one morning, when the children happened to be alone in their uncle’s little room, “where on earth have you put my ‘Robinson Crusoe’?”

“I?” said the little girl, looking up innocently from her work; “I have not so much as seen it.”

“Look for it then!” cried the boy, in the loud coarse tone which he had too faithfully copied from his uncle.

Little Alie was plying her needle diligently, and her brother had nothing to do; but she was much too timid to remonstrate. She set down her work, and moved quietly about

the room, glancing behind this thing and under that; while Johnny, stretched at full length on the floor, amused himself with chucking up marbles.

"There it is!" cried Alie at last, glancing upwards at a high shelf, on which were ranged divers of Jonas's bottles.

"Get it down!" said the boy, who, to judge by his tone, thought himself equal to an admiral at the least.

"I don't think that I can," replied Alie; "I can't reach the shelf, and there's another book and a heavy bottle too on the top of 'Robinson Crusoe.'"

"Goose! can't you get a chair?" was the only reply vouchsafed.

Alie slowly dragged a heavy chair to the spot, while Johnny commenced singing—

"Britons never, never shall be slaves!"

considering of course as exceptions to the rule all gentle, helpless, little British girls, who happen to have strong, tyrannical brothers.

"There!—mind!—take care what you're about!" he cried, as he watched Alie's efforts to accomplish the task for which she had hardly sufficient strength or height. Scarcely were the words uttered when down with a crash came the bottle and the books, almost upsetting poor Alie herself!

Johnny jumped up from the ground in an instant.

"What is to be done?" he exclaimed, looking with dismay at the broken bottle, whose green contents, escaping in all directions, was staining the floor and also the book, which was one of Jonas's greatest treasures.

"Oh! what is to be done?" repeated poor Alie, in real distress.

Johnny felt so angry with himself that he was much inclined, after his usual fashion, to vent his anger upon his sister. Seeing, however, that they were both in the same trouble, and that it had been occasioned by his laziness in making the little girl do what he ought to have done himself, he repressed

his indignation, and turned his mind to the means of remedying the evil.

"My uncle will be in a downright tempest!" he exclaimed. "What say you to a good long walk right off to the farm, to get out of the way of its fury?"

"It would be just as bad when we came back!" said Alie dolefully, stooping to pick up the injured book.

"Don't touch it!" cried Johnny authoritatively; "don't get the stain on your dress as well as on everything else. I have hit on a famous plan. We'll shut up the cat in the room, then go on our walk, and no one on earth will guess that she did not do the mischief."

"Oh! but, Johnny, would it be right?"

"Right? fiddlestick!" cried the boy. "Put on your bonnet and be quick, while I look for Tabby in the kitchen."

Alie had great doubts whether she ought to obey, but she was frightened and confused, and accustomed to submit to the orders of her brother; and, after all, her uncle was so

fond of the cat, that it was likely to suffer much less from his anger than any other creature would have done.

Tabby was soon caught, and placed on the floor near the broken bottle. Johnny dipped one of her paws in the fluid, to serve as further evidence against her, and then came out of the little room.

"I must get out my work; I left it there," said Alie.

"Go in quickly, and get it then," replied Johnny.

Alie went in, and returned with the work, but stood hesitating before she quitted the room, looking back with her hand on the lock.

"O Johnny! Tabby is licking it up."

"So much the better," cried he; "her whiskers will tell tales of her then."

"But, Johnny—"

"Come quickly; I can't stand waiting for you all the day!" exclaimed the boy; "uncle may be back before we get off."

These words quickened the movements of Alie; she closed the door with a sigh.

Very grave and silent was the child during the whole of that long walk; very grave and silent during her visit to the farm. Johnny first laughed at her nonsense, as he called it, and then grew irritable and rude, after the example of his uncle. The walk home was a very unpleasant one to Alie.

But more unpleasant was the arrival at home. The first sight which met the children's eyes, on their return, was poor Tabby stretched out lifeless on the floor of the kitchen, and their uncle bending over her with a flushed face and knitted brow; while their mother, who stood beside him, was vainly endeavouring to calm him.

"Accidents will occur, dear brother—"

"There has been gross carelessness somewhere," growled the sailor; and turning suddenly round towards the children, whom he now first perceived, he thundered out to Johnny, "Was it you, sir, who shut the cat into my room?"

"No," answered Johnny very promptly; then he added, "Alie and I have been out a

long time ; we have been all the way to the farm."

"I may have shut the door myself," said the mother, "without knowing of the cat being in the place." And, to turn the sailor's mind from his loss, she continued, "I'm going up to the village, Jonas, and I've a very large basket to carry ; Johnny's just come off a long walk, or—"

"I'm your man," cried the sailor ; "I'll help you with your load. Just wait a few minutes, till I've buried this poor thing in the garden. I shouldn't like the dogs to get at her—though she's past feeling now, poor Tabby." And as the stern, rough man stooped, raised his dead favourite, and carried it away, Alie thought that she saw something like moisture trembling in his eye.

"Alie," said her mother, "go into that room, and carefully collect the broken pieces of the bottle which poor Tabby managed to knock off the shelf ; and wash that part of the floor which is stained by the liquid. Be attentive not to leave a drop of it anywhere ;

for the contents of the bottle was deadly poison, and I cannot be too thankful that the cat was the only sufferer."

Alie obeyed with a very heavy heart. She was grieved at the death of Tabby, grieved at the vexation of her uncle,—most of all grieved at the thought that she had not acted openly and conscientiously herself.

When she returned to the kitchen, she found Johnny its only occupant, her mother and uncle having set off for the village.

"I say, Alie," cried Johnny, "wasn't it lucky that uncle asked me instead of you about shutting the cat in? 'Twas you that closed the door, you know."

"O Johnny!" said his sister, "I feel so unhappy about it! I wish that I had told mother everything,—I don't think that I could have spoken to uncle. It seems just as if I were deceiving them both!"

"Nonsense!" cried Johnny, in a very loud tone; "you ought to be too happy that the storm has blown over!"

But the conscience of Alie would make itself heard, notwithstanding her brother's voice of scorn. She had been accustomed, from the time when she could first talk, to speak the simple truth, and the whole truth. She knew that there may be falsehood even in *silence*, when that silence tends to deceive. She felt that she had wronged her uncle, by destroying his property, and, however unintentionally, causing the death of his pet; and instead of frankly confessing the wrong, and asking pardon, she was concealing the matter. Alie went slowly up to her own little room, took down from its shelf her well-used Bible,—that would be a safer counsellor than her brother! She opened it, and the first verse upon which her eyes rested was this, *The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.* Alie closed her book, and resting her head upon her hand, sat and thought:—

“Mother has often told me that the language of heaven is truth. and that whoso-

ever *loveth or maketh a lie* shall never be admitted to that happy place! But why should my mind be so troubled? I have not said a single word that is not true. But I have concealed the truth. And why?—because of *the fear of man*, which the Bible tells me *bringeth a snare*. What then should be my straight course of duty? to confess that I threw down the poison? Would not that bring my brother into trouble? No; for it was I who climbed on the chair, I who knocked over the bottle, I who last shut the door,—all the mischief was done by me, though it was not done for my own pleasure. I know what will be my best plan,” said Alie, with a sigh of relief at coming to anything like a decision: “I’ll confess all to mother when she comes back from the village; and she will choose a good time, when my uncle is in a pleasant temper and I am out of the way, and tell him that I killed poor Tabby, but am exceedingly sorry that I did it.”

So Alie returned to the kitchen, and put

on the water to boil for tea, and sat down to her unfinished work, awaiting her mother's return. Her heart beat faster than usual when she heard the clump, clump of her uncle's wooden leg, but still more when he entered the house alone.

"Where's mother?" said Johnny.

"She's gone to the vicarage," replied Jonas. "She met a messenger to tell her that the lady there is taken very ill, and wants some one to nurse her; so she sheered off straight for Brampton, and desired me to come back and tell you."

"When will she return?" asked Alie with anxiety.

"That's when the lady gets better, I s'pose. I suspect that she's cast anchor for a good while, from what I hear," replied the sailor. "But pluck up a good heart, little lass, and don't look as though you were about to set the water-works going; I've brought you something to cheer you up a bit;" and slowly unfolding his red pocket-handkerchief, Jonas displayed a large cake

of gingerbread. "Here's for you," he said, holding it out to his niece.

"O uncle!" cried Alie, without attempting to touch it.

"Take it, will you," said he sharply: "what are you hanging back for?" Alie took the cake, and thanked her uncle in a faltering voice. Jonas stooped down, lighted his pipe, and as he glanced at the warm corner which used to be his favourite's chosen place, and missed her well-known pur, the old sailor gave an unconscious sigh, and "Poor Tabby!" escaped from his lips.

The sound of the sigh, and the words, gave pain to the heart of little Alie. "Here am I receiving kindness from my uncle," thought she, "and knowing how little I deserve it; and yet I have not courage to confess the truth! I am sure that fear is *a* *snare* to me. O that I had a braver heart! so that I should dread nothing but doing wrong! Johnny is as bold as a lion, yet I am sure that even he would be afraid to tell the truth to my uncle!"

"What's the matter with the lass?" cried Jonas with blunt kindness, taking the pipe from his lips, and looking steadily at the child. "Ye're vexed at your mother biding away?"

"It is not that," replied Alie very softly.

"Ye're fretting about the cat?"

"Partly," murmured the child.

"Kind little soul!" exclaimed the sailor heartily: "I'll get a white kitten, or a tortoise-shell for ye, if one's to be had for love or money! But maybe ye're like the Jack-tar, and don't think new friends like the old!" and the rough hard hand of the seaman was laid caressingly on the little girl's shoulder.

"Uncle, you quite mistake me, you—you—would not be so kind if you knew all!" said Alie rapidly. The first difficult step was taken, but poor Alie's cheek was crimson, and she would have felt it at that moment impossible to have raised her eyes from the floor.

"What's all this?" exclaimed Jonas roughly; while Johnny, afraid that the

whole truth was coming out, made a hasty retreat from the kitchen.

"What's all this?" repeated the bluff sailor. Alie had now gone so far that she had not power to retreat. Her little hands pressed tightly together, her voice tremulous and indistinct with fear, she stammered forth, "It was I who knocked down the bottle—and—and shut poor Tabby into your room—and—"

"Shut her in on purpose!" thundered Jonas, starting up from his seat. Alie bent her head as her only reply.

"Shut in the cat that the blame might be laid upon her!—took a long walk that the mean trick might be successful!" At each sentence his voice rose louder and louder, so that Johnny could hear it at the other side of the road, while poor Alie bent like a reed beneath the storm.

"And was your brother with you, girl?" continued the angry sailor, after a short but terrible pause.

Poor Alie was dreadfully perplexed; she

squeezed her hands together tighter than ever; she could not speak, but her silence spoke enough.

“Mean coward!” exclaimed Jonas, striking the table with his clenched fist till it rang again; “and he has set all sail, and made off, and left this little pinnace to brave the storm alone!” Alie burst into tears; and whether it was the sight of these tears, or whether his own words reminded the sailor that Alie at least had now acted an honest, straight-forward part, his anger towards her was gone in a moment, and he drew her kindly to his knee.

“Dry these eyes, and think no more about it,” said he; “you never guessed that the liquid was poison, and accidents, as they say, will happen even in the best-regulated families. But why did not you and your sneak of a brother tell me honestly about breaking the bottle, instead of playing such a cowardly trick as that of shutting up the poor cat in the room?”

“O uncle,” murmured Alie, at length find-

ing her voice, "we knew that you would be so dreadfully angry."

"Humph!" said the sailor thoughtfully. "So the fear of me was a snare to you. Well, you may go after your brother, if he's not run away so far that you cannot find him, and tell him that he may sneak back as soon as he can muster enough of courage, for not a word, good or bad, shall he hear from me about the bottle or the cat. And mind you, my honest little lass," continued Jonas, "I'll not forget the white kitten for you; for though you've not a stout heart you've a brave conscience, and dare speak the truth even to a crabbed old sailor, who you knew would be 'so dreadfully angry.'"

Alie flew off like a bird, her heart lightened of its load, and rejoicing in the consciousness that a painful duty had been performed. And whenever in future life she felt tempted to take a crooked course from the dread of some peril in the straight one, the timid girl found courage in remembering

the verse which had struck her so much on that day,—*The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.*

·The fear of God most high—

It is a holy fear ;

It makes us pass through life as those

Who know their Judge is near.

The fear of sinful Man—

'Tis a debasing fear ;

Shame will be theirs who dare not brave

A censure or a sneer !

It was the fear of God

Through which the Hebrews three

Undaunted met the tyrant's frown,

Unmoved the flames could see !

It was the fear of Man

Weak Pilate's breast within,

That stained his hands with guiltless blood,

His soul with blackest sin !

No courage is like that

Which steadfast faith bestows ;

With God our friend, we would be safe

Were all the world our foes !

Faith but the duty sees,

Where doubt would danger scan :

'Tis through the fear of God alone

We crush the fear of Man !

THE GREAT PLAGUE.

“Fools make a mock at sin.”—PROV. xiv. 9.

WHAT a violent storm is raging!” said Thorn the teacher to his scholars, as, after having dismissed them at the close of the school hours, he found them clustering together in the porch, afraid of venturing forth into the pelting rain, pouring down in large heavy drops, mingled with hail, which danced on the wet brown pavement. “Come back into the room, my children; it is better than standing there in the cold. Amuse yourselves as you like until the weather clears up, while I occupy myself with reading.”

The boys gladly availed themselves of the

permission, and began to play together in one part of the room, while the weary teacher sat down in another, rested his pale brow on his hand, and tried, as far as the noise and talking would let him, to forget his fatigue in a book.

He soon, however, found it impossible not to hear what was passing. His eye rested, indeed, on the page, but his mind could not take in the sense of it. He loved his pupils too well to think that his care of them should end with the hours of study: he looked on the immortal beings committed to his charge as those for whom he must one day render an account to his God and theirs.

"No, we're all tired of that," cried the voice of Bat Nayland, as some well-known game was proposed. "I know something that will give us a deal more fun; let's play at the highwayman and the judge."

"What's that? what's that?" cried a dozen young voices.

"Oh! it's what I saw at the penny theatre, about a clever thief robbing a judge: only

think—robbing a judge!” The last words were repeated around the room in various tones of amusement and surprise.

“Oh! you shall know all about it; but first we must arrange the parts. You, Pat, shall be the thief, and I will be the judge—no, you shall be the judge and I the thief.” He was interrupted by a burst of laughter.

“Be quiet, will you? who’ll be the policeman?”

“I! I!” cried several of the children, eager to join in the proposed play.

“Now, Sam, you shall be the fat landlady,”—there was another roar of merriment, louder than before,—“for you must know that the thief is to get drunk; that’s how he is to be taken by the policeman; and he staggers here and there”—Bat began to imitate the unsteady movements of an intoxicated man, amid the renewed mirth of the children—“and when they seize him he calls out a great oath. You shall hear it all just as I heard it.”

“I hope not,” said Thorn very quietly,

raising his eyes from his book. The boys were quiet in a moment; they had almost forgotten the presence of their teacher.

“Why, sir, do you think that there is any harm?” said Bat Nayland: “it does not make us thieves to have a little fun about them.”

“It lessens your horror for their crime; and remember the words in the Bible, *Fools make a mock at sin*. Can you imagine any true child of God laughing at theft, drunkenness, and swearing?”

There was profound silence in the room.

“This is one cause, I believe, why penny theatres are one of the most fruitful sources of vice and ruin to those who attend them. Wickedness, instead of appearing hateful as it does in God’s Word, is made amusing, and even sometimes attractive; and those who willingly place themselves in the way of being corrupted by such sights, only mock the Holy One when they pray, *Lead us not into temptation*.

“But,” continued the teacher, in a more

cheerful tone, "if I have stopped your amusement in one way, it is but fair that I should contribute to it in another. I hear the rain still pattering without—what would you say to my telling you a story?"

"A story! a story!" repeated the scholars, forming in a little circle around their teacher; for where are the children to be found upon earth on whom that word does not act like a spell!

"It is now long long ago," commenced Thorn, "nearly two hundred years, since the fearful plague raged in London. Nothing which we have witnessed in these happier days can give an idea of the horrors of that time. It is said that nearly seventy thousand people perished of this awful malady; some authors make the number even ninety thousand. The nearest relatives were afraid of each other. When an unfortunate being showed symptoms that the disease had seized him—the swelling under the arms, the pain in the throat, the black spots, which were signs of the plague—his very servants fled

from him in terror; and unless some one was found to help the sufferer from love even stronger than fear of death, he was left to perish alone: for the plague was fearfully infectious. When a door was marked with a cross, the sign that the fearful scourge had entered the house, it was shunned by all but the driver of the dead-cart—that gloomy conveyance which moved slowly through the silent streets to carry away the bodies of those who had sunk beneath the terrible disease.”

“Was London ever in such a horrible state?” cried Bat Nayland; “it must have been a thousand times worse than the cholera.”

“What I have told you about it I believe to be strictly true. I leave you all, however, to judge whether what I am about to relate can be so.

“In a small house, at the time when the plague was raging, dwelt a widow with five young children. She loved them with the fondest, truest love; they were all that were

left her in the world. From the first appearance of the plague in London her heart had been full of painful anxiety—far less for herself than for them. Determined to take every human precaution to guard her little ones from danger, she forbade them to quit the house, which she only left herself in order to procure food, holding a handkerchief steeped in vinegar before her face, as far as possible to keep out infection. Her anxiety became yet more distressing when she saw one morning on the door of the very opposite house the fatal sign marked, and below it chalked the heart-touching words, ‘Lord, have mercy upon us!’

“That day the mother was compelled to go out for bread. She left her home with a very heavy heart, first looking earnestly upon all and each of her children, to see if they yet appeared healthy and well, repeating her command that none should stir out, and inwardly breathing a prayer that the Almighty would preserve them during her absence.

“As she returned with hurried steps towards her home, shuddering at the recollection of the sights of horror which she had seen in the course of her walk, with terror she observed her eldest son *playing upon the very threshold of the infected house*, and trying to imitate with a piece of chalk the dreadful sign upon the door!”

“The little idiot!”—“He must have been without his senses!”—“What did the poor mother do?” were the exclamations which burst from Thorn’s listeners.

“She could not speak, in the transport of her anger and grief. She seized him by the arm, and dragged him into her own house, with feelings which only a mother can understand. She found her four other children assembled in her little parlour, amusing themselves by—would you believe it?—playing at *catching the plague!*”

“Oh no, no!” cried the children at once. “You told us that we should judge whether the story were true, and we are sure that this cannot be true.”

“And why not?” inquired the teacher.

“Because,” answered Bat, replying for the rest, “the plague was too horrible a thing to make a joke of. Just at a time when their mother was so anxious, when thousands were suffering so much around them—no, no! that would have been too bad; they could never have made game of the plague!”

“And yet what were my pupils doing ten minutes ago but making game of a far worse disease than the plague—the fatal disease of sin? Its spots are blacker, the pain it gives more terrible: often has it caused the death of the body, and, except where repented of and forsaken, the death, the endless death of the soul. Oh, my children! it may be your lot, as it was that mother’s, to be *obliged* to go out and meet the danger, for, the Almighty may have seen good to place you in situations of great temptation; but, if so, take every means of guarding your own hearts, by faith, watchfulness, and prayer. But oh! never wilfully throw yourselves

into temptation; *do not play upon the threshold of the infected house*; do not trifle with the danger which it is possible to avoid; and when inclined to think lightly or speak lightly of that which brought ruin and death into the world, remember that *fools make a mock at sin*, but that to free us from its terrible disease, and the fatal consequences which it brings, cost the Eternal Son of the Most High tears, blood, and even life itself."

Fools make a mock at sin ; but oh !
God's wiser children do not so :
 They know too well the strife with sin,
 How hard the battle is to win ;
 They laugh not at the wound within,
For they its danger know.
Oh ! guide thy mirth by wisdom's rules,
For sorrow ends the laugh of fools !

Fools make a mock at sin ; but oh !
Lost, guilty spirits do not so :
 They know too well the price it cost ;
 They know through it that heaven was lost.
 No drowning seaman, tempest-tost,
Jests as he sinks below !
Oh ! guide thy mirth by wisdom's rules,
For sorrow ends the laugh of fools !

Fools make a mock at sin ; but oh !

God's holy angels do not so :

For they upon the Cross have gazed,—

The Cross which sin, *our* sin, had raised,—

And viewed, all wondering and amazed,

A Saviour's life-blood flow !

Then write these words thy heart within,—

Fools, and fools only, mock at sin !



